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Maj. John D. Servis, Commander, 101st Airborne Division

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March 6, 1953

T. L. Shipman, M. D.

HEALTH HAZARDS OF OPERATION CASTLE

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The information contained herein is classified data as  
defined in the Atomic Energy Act of 1946.

This is in somewhat belated reply to your memo of 13 February 1953. I have purposely been slow in answering in order that I might have full opportunity to discuss the matter thoroughly with those people whom I consider the best authorities on these problems. My comments will be general rather than specific and will perhaps cover a good deal more territory than was actually required by your request.

As far as actual health hazards at Operation Castle are concerned, there is not much one can say except that they will be similar to those at previous Eniwetok operations only more so. The possibilities and the dangers of fall out should be no greater than has been the case in the past. With detonations of high yield it becomes extremely difficult to predict the shape and location of the fall-out pattern. Some material obviously is coming down somewhere, and there can never be any positive assurance that some of this will not land on inhabited islands or on ships of the Task Force. If this does happen, it creates an annoying situation, but in all probability not one which can in any way be regarded as truly hazardous. It must be admitted that some uncertainties regarding this matter still exist, and if all conditions were just right, it might be possible to produce a situation more than annoying, at least in the immediate vicinity of the shot islands.

One situation which will be somewhat different from previous tests involves the necessity of having ships of the Task Force enter contaminated waters. It is difficult to assess the amount of trouble this might cause, but examination of the pertinent data from Operation Crossroads indicates that the contamination which will be acquired by ships operating in such waters may be a nuisance but will not approach hazardous conditions.

Right here we encounter one problem which has been a troublesome one in the past, namely, the reluctance of naval officers to permit their blessed ships to become even moderately contaminated. I regard it as essential that a reasonable understanding be arrived at well in advance between CJTF-7 and CTG 7.3. The naval Task Group must be made to realize and to accept the fact that we are not going to make an omelet without breaking eggs. If the Navy is to provide the support for the operation which is called for, they must be prepared to accept a certain amount of contamination of their ships. It is my opinion, and that of those with whom I have discussed this problem, that this contamination will not reach serious proportions and that the decay of the fission products together with natural and man-made decontamination will so reduce the contamination that extensive overhaul after return to California will be quite unnecessary.

REPOSITORY U.S. AIR FORCE NAT LAB

COLLECTION CL-4

BOX No 11331-1

FOLDER Castle General

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